

## ON THE MODUS OPERANDI OF MERCURY:

Vide 3d. EDITION OF CLARE'S NEW AND EASY METHOD.

DR. SAUNDERS, who has translated PLENCK, says, "from pathology we learn, that *five postulata* are required, before the venereal virus can be perfectly destroyed by Mercury. 1st, That so much Mercury be taken into the body, as is necessary for overcoming and destroying the venereal virus that exists in it. 2dly, That the Mercury flow freely through all the small vessels of our system. 3dly, That it impregnate every particle of our fluids. 4thly, That it remain united with our fluids for some length of time, and frequently circulate with them. 5thly, That at last the virus along with the Mercury be conveniently evacuated by natural excretions." The same Author observes, that, "a salivation is very inconvenient, is dangerous, does not give a certain cure, is not critical, nor can it be excited in every subject, nor is it necessary in any. Its inconveniences are obvious, its danger evident, for, as Astruc attests, violent Fevers, Diarrhaas, Dysentery, Haemoptoe, &c. &c. often supervene; nor is it necessary for the cure, as many people, who have been violently distempered, have been cured thoroughly without salivation. Mercury, together with the venereal virus, may be more conveniently and easily evacuated by the ordinary excretions of sweat, stool, and urine."

Dr. Mead observes, that "the saline chrystals of the Mercury vellicate and twitch the sensible membranes of the stomach to that degree, as excites them to an excretion of their contents and glandular juices upwards or downwards, according as the force of irritation is greater or less."

Dr. Cullen, in his Lecture on the Operation of Mercury, says, "from its stimulus in the stomach it proves emetic, and carried into the intestines, it is purgative from the same quality; into the blood diuretic and diaphoretic, and in short like other evacuants, a very general stimulus." "In the intestines the stimulus of the mercurial preparations is exerted with greater effect, but still it is confined to the part, and Mercury acting in this manner is carried off without any further effects on the system."

"When we purge we commonly think we are operating on the common sewer of the system: but little advantage is to be found from Mercury employed in this way, as its virtues depend chiefly on its operation on the body in general."

The same gentleman observes, that "purging is never excited by any means, without spasms of the intestines, which, when the operation is continued, are apt to end in durable spasm and inflammation. These are attended with very dangerous consequences. Neither does the method of purging by unction answer much better (although perhaps more effectual) because it is attended with very great pain."

Dr. Saunders says, "He has known patients who have had violent fevers excited by mercury applied in the form of unction."

The same Author adds, "That a gentleman who had recourse to mercurial unction, being seized with a fever, sent for him and communicated to him his venereal complaints. His pulse was quick and hard, he complained of pain

pain in his back, headach, thirst, and other such symptoms as I had frequently seen arise from a mercurial course conducted on the plan here prescribed."

Dr. Fordyce in his *Elements*, &c. observes, that "whatever preparation we employ, we should give it in such a manner, and in such a dose, as to produce hardness, fullness, and moderate frequency of the pulse, with as little sensible evacuation as possible; for the mercury cures sooner, and with greater certainty, when the strength is but little, than when it is much reduced by."

He observes, "It is never necessary to salivate a patient, unless he be so irritable, that the smallest dose of Mercury immediately affects his mouth, or unless the disease be proceeding so fast that it would be hazardous to wait till it was checked by the remedy given in such a manner as to avoid salivation; or excepting when we cannot trust to his using it regularly. On the contrary, salivation renders the effects of the medicine uncertain.—The same Author says, "If, notwithstanding these precautions, a salivation should come on, we know of no remedy which will remove it with any degree of certainty, although sulphur, camphire, and purgatives have been recommended for this purpose. If therefore the case be urgent, the best way is to let it go on, using the mercurial ointment as before described."

I think it much more safe to permit the gradual evacuation of mercury (after it has circulated some time, and subdued the *virus*) by one or other of the excretions, than to confine it within the body by opiates or other means, so as to occasion *hardness, fullness, and acceleration of the pulse*. The saturation, or surcharge, of the system with mercury is very hazardous, as it sometimes terminates in a fatal diarrhœa. Surely it is most prudent to permit a little of the mercury to depart, and throw into the circulation such a proportion only, as may be altogether safe and yet sufficient to keep up a gentle mercurial stimulus in the habit.

Mercury and wine operate somewhat alike upon the body. If a certain quantity of wine is drank, hardness, fullness, and acceleration of the pulse will supervene, till at length in common an evacuation takes place; when it does not, and the wine is retained there, like mercury exhibited as an alterative) it excites feverish heat, and does the constitution much more injury than when it passes off gradually by any of the ordinary evacuations.

I have ever found those patients more easily cured, who were most susceptible of the mercurial stimulus. Let there be an affection of the mouth and gums, (parts which, from the less irritability of their surfaces, are best calculated to endure friction) and an amendment of the complaint takes place, at least, nine times in ten; the mercury will run off in general very soon if the process is discontinued, which it must not be, but the tenderness of the mouth is to be kept up to a certain degree, (according to the urgency of the disorder, and to prevent a relapse) by the persevering use of the remedy in *small* quantity. It is not the mere *quantum* of mercury, but the method of using it, which in my opinion is the chief circumstance to be relied on in the cure. I would certainly run the risk, (if there was any) of *not immediately curing*, rather than expose my patient to the hazard of a large quantity of accumulated mercury, which, by its sudden and violent descent, has so often proved fatal.